



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

A Peace Economy: Rebalancing Spending Priorities

“Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict; yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity.

-Pope Francis, [Invocation for Peace, June 8, 2014](#)

BACKGROUND

The increased attention in recent years on the federal budget deficit and national debt has led to loud calls for fiscal restraint and substantial spending reductions. The priorities of federal spending--where the dollars actually go, and how many--has received much less attention, so the real imbalance that exists in the federal discretionary budget is unknown to many.

Over half of the total federal discretionary budget (not including mandatory spending programs such as Medicare, Social Security, veterans' retirement benefits, or SNAP [food stamps]) goes to military spending.

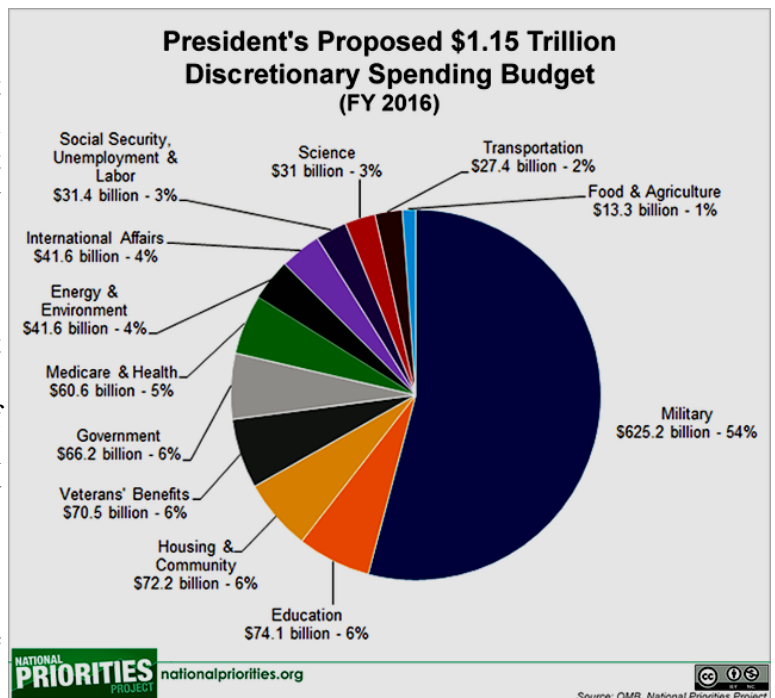
Due to budget realities, this imbalance comes at the expense of programs at home and abroad that alleviate poverty and create opportunity domestically and internationally. As a result, millions of people--a disproportionate number of them women and children--continue to live in poverty because sufficient aid is not forthcoming.

It is also important to note that not only does the nation's discretionary budget devote disproportionate resources to the military, but also that the country spends disproportionately relative

to others. The US spends more on its military and defense than the next 10 highest countries combined. Most of those countries are allies.

Countries have an obligation to defend their people and ensure peace, which requires maintaining a national defense. They also have additional responsibilities to promote human development domestically and abroad, advance the common good and, as Pope Francis reminds us, care for our common home. When these obligations and responsibilities are not in proper balance, serious moral questions arise.

Rebalancing this will demand wise investments in domestic antipoverty programs as well as engaging in relations with other countries from a place of mutual respect and commitment to dialogue, all with an eye toward the consequences of choices and decisions on the environment.



CATHOLIC TEACHING

The [Second Vatican Council](#) taught:

[T]he arms race... is not a safe way to preserve a steady peace.... While extravagant sums are being spent for the furnishing of ever new weapons, an adequate remedy cannot be provided for the multiple miseries afflicting the whole modern world. [T]he arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree. (no. 81)

In [Centesimus Annus](#), Saint John Paul II stressed the importance of development in turning away from war:

Just as within individual societies it is possible and right to organize a solid economy which will direct the functioning of the market to the common good, so too there is a similar need for adequate interventions on the international level.... Creating such conditions calls for a concerted worldwide effort to promote development, an effort which also involves sacrificing the positions of income and of power enjoyed by the more developed economies. (no. 52)

The [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) lays out a proper framework for government spending:

... Just, efficient and effective public financing will have very positive effects on the economy, because it will encourage employment growth and sustain business and non-profit activities and help to increase the credibility of the State as the guarantor of systems of social insurance and protection that are designed above all to protect the weakest members of society.

... In the redistribution of resources, public spending must observe the principles of solidarity, equality and making use of talents. It must also pay greater attention to families, designating an adequate amount of resources for this purpose. (no. 355)

Pope Francis reminds us in [Evangelii Gaudium](#) that political life, at its best, can effect positive change:

Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need to be convinced that charity “is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)”. I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! (no. 205)

USCCB POSITION

USCCB has consistently stated that federal spending priorities are a reflection of values, so they should abide by moral criteria. Among them is the belief that “*a just framework cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly*” ([Letter to Congress on FY2016 budget](#)).

In [Economic Justice for All](#), the bishops write:

The precarious economic situation of so many people and so many families calls for examination of U.S. economic arrangements.... The investment of human creativity and material resources in the production of the weapons of war makes these economic problems even more difficult to solve.... Defense policies must be evaluated and assessed in light of their real contribution to freedom, justice, and peace for the citizens of our own and other nations. (no. 19-20)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

USCCB Federal Budget Page: usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/